

- ENHANCING TERTIARY EXPERIENCE:
PEDAGOGY FOR STUDENT
DEVELOPMENT: A FEMINIST APPROACH



UNIVERSITY of the
WESTERN CAPE

УНИВЕРСИТИ ОУ ВЕСТЕРН КАПЕ



Maria van Staden

A place of quality,
a place to grow, from hope
to action through knowledge

Gender Equity Unit Food Security



Gender Equity Unit HumaNature



Gender Equity Unit

Mentoring programme



Gender Equity Unit

LOUD ENUF



Gender Equity Unit Interactive Theatre and drama Speak out against violence against women



Gender Equity Unit

IMBEWU “The Seed”

Gender Equity Unit News letter

Gender Equity Unit programmes

- GEU provides a safe space outside the lecture room and links the student with realities of society through their active student development programmes.
- These programmes bring the students in the circle of learning, a dialectical context where there is serious and rigorous critical exchange.
- There after the circle is expanded through mentoring, a process that is essential to building on, bringing organisational capacity and ensuring its sustainability. .

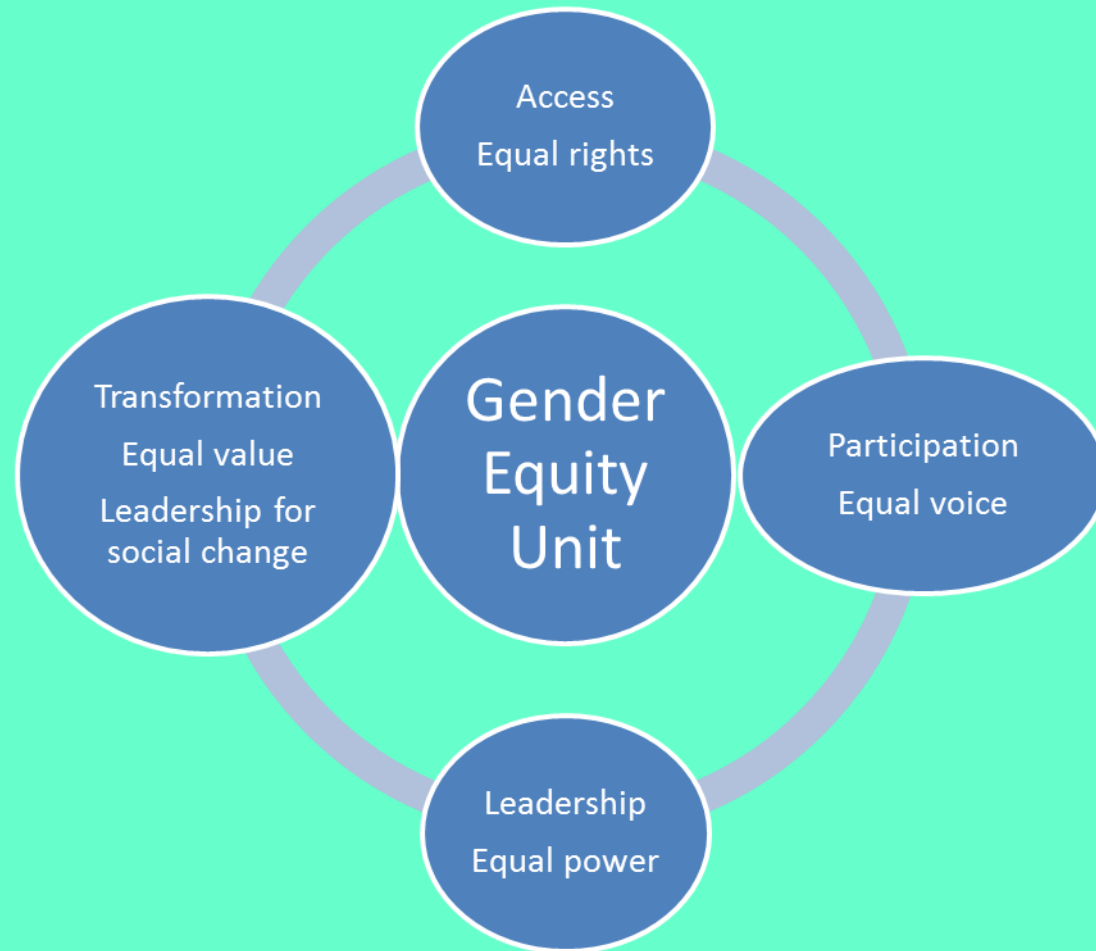
Learning Circle



Gender Equity Unit Programmes

- The GEU student development programmes support and assert students' human rights through variety of activities which include conscientization , education and networking. The approach towards educating around human rights is interactive, experimental and practical

Gender Equity Unit



PEDAGOGY FOR STUDENT DEVELOPMENT:

- The paper demonstrates how the programmes and feminist pedagogy link a diversified student population in a space; empower students to find their voices and to build a better understanding between individuals and create an arena in which respect for difference fosters an environment in which learning takes place

Feminist pedagogy and student development

- In this paper we reflect on the lived experiences of three students involved in the Gender Equity Unit student development programmes for the past four years in various roles as from being a member to programme leader.
- Most of the studies focus on feminist pedagogy as a teaching/learning process to create a more empowering learning environment for students in the classroom and the creative methods that need to be employed by teachers. In this paper I explore the concept of feminist pedagogy in a space outside the classroom and how it informs the teaching and learning processes

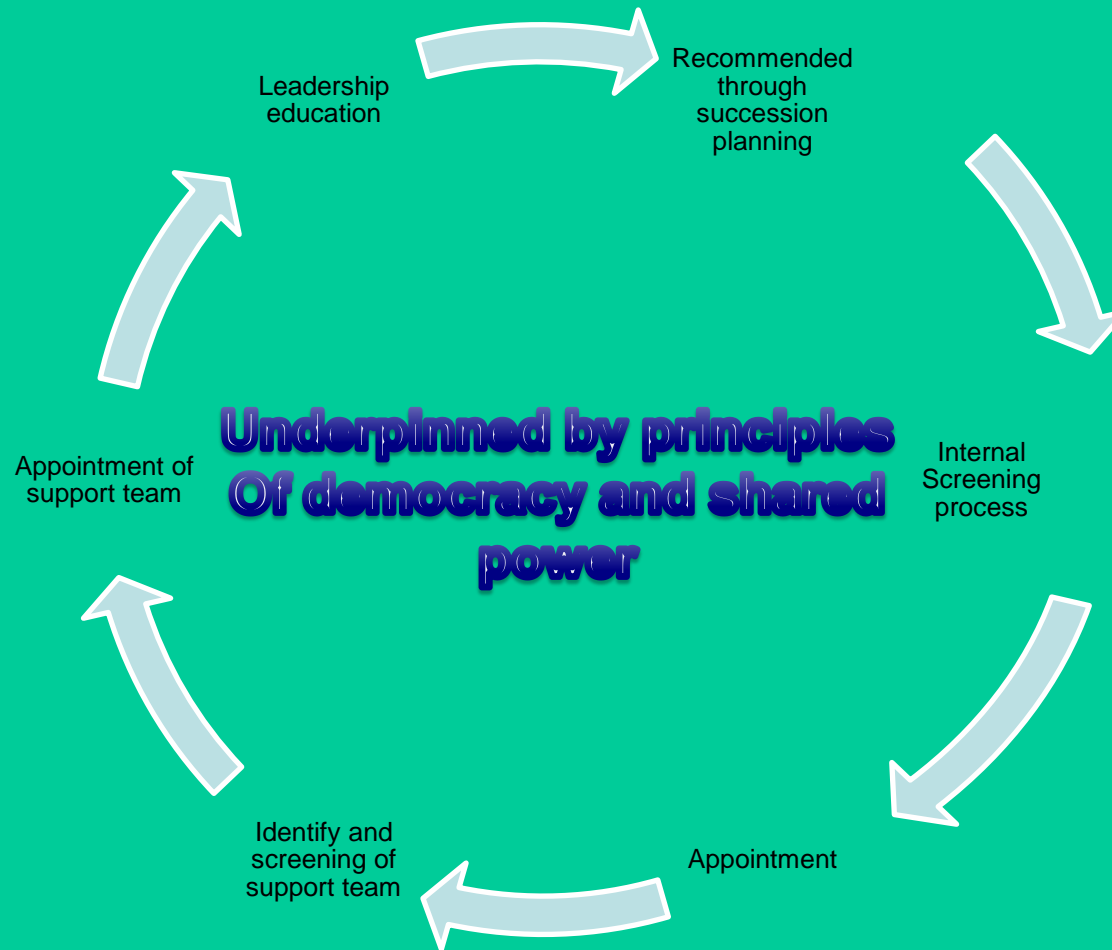
Feminist pedagogy

- Central to the agenda of feminist pedagogy is the empowering of students to become critical and creative learners. In fostering critical and creative thinking , it is important that students are encouraged to engage freely in discipline and come to rely less on the authority of the instructor.
- Feminist pedagogy is student –centred, less hierarchal and emphasizes cooperation and community.

Feminist pedagogy and leadership

- “Leadership in its liberatory aspect as an active element of praxis is crucial concept in feminist pedagogy. (Shrewsbury).
- Therefore leadership development forms a very important part in student development programme.

Programme leadership



Feminist pedagogy and leadership

- Leadership education programme focuses on leadership roles, leadership styles and learns how to find connections between their needs and the needs of others.
- Furthermore the leaders learn about groups, group dynamics, problem solving skills, programme planning and how to evaluate their programme plan. The unit has support mechanism such as programme leaders 'forum in place and it is utilised for education, creating a community with a shared purpose.

Feminist pedagogy and leadership

- As we educate students into leaders it should be noted that “they cannot, all be leaders, at the same time, all time for all things.” Shrewsbury says, “Dynamic and effective leader lies somewhere between leadership and followship because the effective leaders have a responsibility to the relationships that they have developed in the community and can properly identify where their role is within it.”

Feminist pedagogy and learning circles

- Briskin notes, “Feminism is about social change, it is a politic of transformation.
- The Unit adopts a feminist approach in student development which supports the inclusion of feminist pedagogy in students’ education.

Feminist pedagogy and learning circles

- A student entering the Gender Equity Unit will be welcomed into a circle of orientation which aimed to guide the student to choose the programme of interest, followed by an interview conducted from a strength based approach, identifying the strengths that persons bring to enhance his or her learning and those of others

Feminist pedagogy and learning circles

- Through the feminist pedagogical intervention the leadership structures embody the “concept of power as a capacity and potential rather than domination...Under the conceptions of power as capacity, the goal is to increase the power of all actors, not to limit the power of some”(Shrewsbury, 1993: 10).

Feminist pedagogy and learning circles

- As a facilitator of the workshops presented to the student volunteers at the unit I acknowledge my role as a facilitator as “a position of power over others” therefore former programme leaders are invited to be involved in the facilitation of workshops and in that way the learning process was enriched.

Feminist pedagogy and learning circles

- Programme leadership and members of each programme is responsible to developed an action plan, In her role as support team member Sandra says, “I was able to express myself, my personal and political views through effective brainstorming sessions led by programme leader.”

Feminist pedagogy and learning circles

- This statement was confirmed by Bongi stating “it allows me to come out of my shell, learning from each other.” Whereas Joan experienced the vigorous debates as invaluable tool that “opened her intellectual activism; observing issues from different perspectives.” Sandra claimed that “ideas were amazing and tangible”.

Feminist pedagogy and learning circle

- Indeed, Michela (2014) argued that “feminist pedagogy that is grounded in ideals of gender equity, societal value based upon individual capacity, and caring promotes “development of an atmosphere of mutual respect, trust, and community in the classroom; shared leadership; cooperative structures; integration of cognitive and affective learning; and action.”
- This view of the learning process becomes “a model of ways for the students to work together to accomplish mutual or shared goals and to help each other reach individual goals.”(Shrewsbury, 1993: 9).

Feminist pedagogy and learning circles

- The Unit draws from the principles explored by Hopkins et al (2010a) that may be applied to the design of inclusive learning and teaching environments that include the creation of collaborative safe spaces guided by a programme contract for collaborative learning behaviour ensuring that members get to know each other as individuals, encouraging student volunteers to articulate their thinking openly.

Feminist pedagogy and learning circle

- “We are boxed not express our sexuality” a view hold by Joan, a programme leader. She acknowledged being challenged in the learning circles which attract students from different paths of life. Joan conveyed that “the acronym LGTBI (Lesbian Gay Transgender Bisexual Intersex) was for the first time introduced to me in a workshop at the Gender Equity Unit and I have learnt to embrace it.”

Feminist pedagogy and learning circles

- It was pointed out by students interviewed that the learning circle has been a liberatory space for all of them , where they have learnt to respect each other's differences rather than fear them as noted by Shrewsbury.
- An innovative slogan: “different is the new normal” emerged from the liberatory space. Sandra describes the Unit as “artistic space” given her experience during the International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia awareness campaign where a poem was delivered by the Programme leader of the Loud Enuf programme.

Feminist pedagogy and learning circles

- These words “Why do I need to be identified as your gay friend instead of just being your friend” unlocked deep feelings of hurt caused by labelling. In the learning circle students integrate the skills of critical thinking with respect. Sandra, a student with a disability questions “why do we need to be labelled; labels keep us behind.” To break down all these barriers the Unit employs a feminist pedagogical strategy that is “engaged teaching/learning-engaged with self in a continuing reflective process: ...engaged in struggle to get beyond our sexism and racism and classism and homophobia and other destructive hatreds and to work together to enhance our knowledge: engaged with the community and movements for social change (Shrewsbury, 1993: 8).

Feminist pedagogy and lived experiences

- An important aspect of feminist pedagogy is to actively involve students and to make use of the experience grounded in their own lives – worlds in the teaching programme as such experiences are perceived as a learning source of all. (van Hoven et al , 82). Bell hooks writes that “feminist pedagogy should engage students in a learning process that makes the world “more rather than less real.”

Feminist pedagogy and lived experiences

- Using personal experience is beneficial in attempting to raise consciousness and has ultimately transformed students from passive recipients of knowledge to active knowers who see themselves as agents of social agents. Manicon says, “Safety must be consciously constructed to allow women and [minority groups] to speak on certain of their experiences” and this is practice in the feminist space.

Feminist pedagogy and lived experiences

- Shrewbury writes “students may find connections with themselves, their individual and collective pasts, with others and with the future”, a learning circle experience in the edudrama programme articulated by Joan. Students that participated in the student development programmes became agents of change, designing and implementing an activist strategy to address issues of social justice and human rights.

Feminist pedagogy and peer led discussions

“We can all walk together despite our disability” a theme that informed the outing to a Nature Reserve on campus. The group was led by a student with a hearing disability. The day started off with an information session planned by the programme Leader and support team of the HumaNature programme aimed to brief the participants on the day’s activities. The group comprising of non – disabled and students with disabilities received a card which stated their disability.

Feminist pedagogy and peer led discussions

- The aim of the activity was to examine their own attitudes to disabilities, their stereotypes and to gain factual and practical experience about persons with disabilities. Sandra states that communication was key to the activity.
- Throughout the journey the participants were asking questions about the conditions of the various types of disabilities, how they cope in their everyday lives. A deep sense of empathy and solidarity developed among this group and it is evident through the articles published in Gender Equity Unit newsletter that difference is enabled and fostered by communication.

Feminist pedagogy and student voice

- Ann Gill argues “If society is to embrace and value all members, it must break the silences of women, ethnic minorities and others located on the margin of society . We must learn to listen to all voices ,and individuals must find an authentic voice of their own.”

Feminist pedagogy and student voice

- As Weiner says, “Central to feminism and feministic pedagogical is the development of voice.” There exist no possibilities that a person with a hearing disability will be able to be heard in a class of five hundred students. This was the challenge faced by a student . Sandra says, ‘your voice becomes silent when you are faced with the University’s administration processes – “Someone need to speak on your behalf” as the student.

Feminist pedagogy and student voice

- A student currently in her final year of teaching shared her experience as a preparatory space for her teaching career especially dealing with issues of “diversity experience based on gender, race ,class and sexual orientation and to promote the inclusivity of voices and participation

In conclusion

- Employing a holistic model of learning at the Unit is beneficial for the staff and students.
- Working in a feminist pedagogical framework is crucial to address issues of difference , allowing students to take agency for social change within their personal life and the communities they serve .